

Louis Theroux on why marketing is an ‘unacknowledged art form’

The documentary maker and journalist says he sees much in marketing “to enjoy” and is intrigued by the balance of “seduction and sales”.

By [Lucy Tesser](#) 11 Oct 2018 1:28 pm



Documentary maker and broadcaster Louis Theroux believes marketing is an “unacknowledged art form”, the most intriguing aspect of which is its careful balance of “seduction and sales”.

Speaking on the headline stage at the [Festival of Marketing](#) yesterday (10 October), he said: “There’s an aspect of marketing that I do find interesting that hinges on that combination of seduction and sales, which I don’t think is antagonistic in itself. There’s much about marketing to enjoy.”

He referenced a piece by American author John Updike in which he compared advertisers to the people who carved gargoyles on medieval churches.

“It was the idea that what might look from the outside as something that is anonymous and mercenary is actually an unacknowledged art form,” he said.

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Louis Theroux

While Theroux, who is famous for his *Weird Weekend* documentary series and interviews with the likes of Jimmy Savile, has never made marketing the focus of one of his exposés, he said the closest thing he's done was a documentary about casinos in Las Vegas.

"We were with what they call hosts, whose job it is to get gamblers, especially the high stakes gamblers, to spend and spend," he explained. "There's something in the way they combine a kind of friendship, because they were very charming and they would arrange comfortable stays for all the hotel guests at the casinos and give them loads of free stuff, but the end game was to get them to spend more... it was about this complicated relationship."

In order to build closer relationships with consumers, he advised marketers to create compelling narratives, which he says is about finding a connection.

"It's the case of finding something [in common] and a lot of that resides in getting in touch with your own desire. We are, as banal as it may sound, not so very different from each other. And the more we get separated from one another in society, the more refreshing and redemptive it is when we find small connections.

"I like to try and do that with my programmes. I like to try and find stories that are full of angst and darkness but at the same time find light and connection, and it's that tension and release. In the same way in advertising, whether you're on the tube, at home, or you're engaging with something online, there are some small forms of connection that can be created in all different media."